



August 12,

Dear M. Blank:

I want you to know how happy I am that the District has finally hired someone to give some real leadership to our special education program. While Sidney Green was always sympathetic, it takes more clout to get somethings done, and Dr. Forney had other fish to fry. I am looking forward to your being able to straighten things out here and help me overcome some of the problems I have been having with Mr. Strong (my principal). He just doesn't really want a special education class in his school and I think he has done everything possible to keep it from succeeding. I know there are lots more youngsters in the Jr. High Classes who are too mature to stay there and ought to be in a Sr. High Program, but my loud and long statements of that fact just fell on deaf ears. Also, my attempts to get my students into some of the extra-curricular activities here at South High last year were stopped every time I turned around. I know some of my boys could make it in the basic woodworking classes and Mr. Miller, the teacher, says he would be willing to try them, but Mr. Strong keeps stalling and insisting that there are too many scheduling problems. There are many more things, too numerous to mention, which I need your help on, but you'll learn about those soon enough.

Sincerely,

Mabel Underhill

TO: Lee Blank

DATE: August 14

FROM: Sidney Green  
Special Education Consultant

Welcome!! It is great to have some reinforcements. In my few years here I have decided that although I like the Consultant role for myself, the organization really needed an administrative level person. However, let me assure you that I had no personal designs on the job, and was more than pleased to see the "powers that be" search for a more highly qualified person, such as you.

If there is anything I can do to help you "get on board" don't hesitate to ask. I feel that I know the programs and services for students with mild-moderate disabilities well. The curriculum and instruction are in fair shape, but I haven't scratched the surface on other programs.

I'd like to talk with you about what's happening in the program for children with moderate mental retardation as soon as you have a chance to hang up your hat.

You probably are aware, persons on the Consultant schedule have a shorter contract year, so I won't officially be "in" till the week before school starts. But I will be at home most of the time, if you would like to give me a call.

TO: Lee Blank

DATE: Sept. 21

FROM: Lillian Petre  
McClellan Junior High

I don't like to complain after all the help you have given me in getting situated in my new job, and I do like the children very much, but there is one problem which is worrying me more as time goes on. Since my room is located in the basement of the building, the regular kids rarely have any association with it. If they do, it's only to occasionally see the custodian or something. Honest, we're in a state of complete isolation. I don't mind this too much as I'm awfully busy, but it has become a real problem to the kids. My class reports here at 8:30 A.M. and they don't even leave the room until lunch at 12 o'clock. Then back at 12:45 until 3:15 when they go home. They don't have physical education with the regular students because the P.E. teacher feels they would cause trouble. The regular students are allowed this year to sit where they choose in assembly. However, Mr. Coleman has advised me that my kids should sit together.

If some how my kids could be assigned to regular homerooms in the morning, at least they would get a chance to see the regular children. There are 23 homerooms, and I have talked with a number of the new teachers who have homerooms and they agree it would be all right to have some of my kids assigned with them. I feel that some people I talked with, however, didn't want to be bothered with those "crazy" kids.

I talked with Mr. Coleman about this homeroom idea, but he so much as told me that he didn't see where this was particularly important. He hinted that I should be concentrating on the bigger problems and not bothering with such trivia. Maybe you can get him to see that the kids do have a legitimate gripe and that it is "big" to them. Could you talk to him about it?

TO: Lee Blank

DATE: September 26

FROM: Fran O'Hara

As you are undoubtedly aware, the contract recently negotiated between the DFT bargaining unit and our Board of Education includes the provisions that "Since it is the responsibility of the Board to provide special educational programs for pupils who cannot be appropriately educated within regular classes, teachers shall not be required to maintain in their classrooms, pupils who are disturbing and disruptive to normal classroom decorum."

This may have some implications for your program, particularly if you try to "mainstream" any of the kids who have been identified as emotionally disturbed. On the other hand, it can give you some leverage for adding new classes for problems of one kind or another, if you think that's what we need.

TO: Lee Blank

DATE: September 27

FROM: Miss Mollie Matson

When Mrs. Johnson and I met with you before school started, to confirm our schedules for this year, I forgot to bring up a matter of which I believe needs attention.

It was my feeling last year that it was entirely unrealistic to expect one therapist to work efficiently in eight different elementary schools plus the extra work we try to squeeze in at a few of the secondary schools. It is not so much a matter of total case load, as it is the difficulty of so much travel and attempting to maintain a place to work in that many different locations. I understand that regulations from the State Commissioner of Education would also support my contention. I realize that the present situation has existed for some years and perhaps it is presumptuous of me to even suggest a change, but since you are new and this comes under your responsibility, I feel that I would be professionally remiss if I did not call it to your attention.

TO: Lee Blank

DATE: September 28

FROM: Miss Elizabeth Davis  
Adams School

I won't take up your time with a lot of details. Billy Halverson was placed in my primary special class at the end of the school year last June before you got here. Billy did fail the first grade and wasn't doing much better the second time around according to the original teacher's referral. When he was tested last spring, he scored in the borderline area. Now doesn't borderline mean that he could go either way? But since he was a regular pupil in our building, he got placed in my class without much discussion or any of the usual red-tape that is involved when kids are transferred between schools. He's way ahead of my class in reading and in some phases of arithmetic. He knows what a sentence is and can make up and write his own experience charts. He just doesn't fit into the homogenous group that I have.

Now please don't suggest that I talk to my principal. With kids inside our building, Mr. Evans has a one-track mind when he sees a test score. He just writes the child into a class without even talking to the teachers involved. I'm not sure what "due process" means, but I don't think it's happening here.

Please come out to look at this situation as soon as possible. The sooner that we are able to get Bill back into a regular classroom the better off he'll be.

September 28

M. Lee Blank  
Director of Special Education

Dear M. Blank:

As a parent, I want you to know that I don't approve of the way Mr. Sullivan dresses. Just because our children are retarded doesn't mean they don't deserve to have teachers with as much dignity as any other child. Mr. Sullivan is always emphasizing that after all our children are severely retarded and are being housed in a separate part of the West Side School, and he says that since so much of the work he is doing with our youngsters is involved in the gardening and housework projects that work clothes are the only appropriate thing. Well that may be so, but it seems like if he weren't so lazy he should change to regular teaching clothes when he is giving the children their reading and writing work in the classroom. When I have spoken to him about this, he gets me tied up in double talk so that I'm too mad to make good sense. I don't think we should have to put up with this, and I would like to know your stand on the issue.

Sincerely,

Mrs. James Curry



INTER-OFFICE MEMORANDUM

TO: Lee  
  
FROM: Sidney

DATE: September 29

Thought I'd call this to your attention now, as I have some uncertainty about our respective roles, and want to make sure we don't give people conflicting signals.

As you know, my title has always been Special Education Consultant and to the best of my knowledge I have been functioning strictly as a consultant -- not making evaluative judgements (at least in any official sense) regarding personnel or program quality. And I've liked it that way. After all, I don't have the state certification for administration and supervision of special education.

On the other hand, everyone understands that your position is administrative, which implies a lot of things, like evaluation and other accountability related functions. Right? So what's the problem?

With your appearance on the scene, I have heard casual references by some of the central office administrators and principal suggesting that my function might be in some way as your assistant. In fact, one principal introduced me to a new parent as "the Assistant Director of Special Education." I wouldn't have been concerned about his inaccuracy, except that shortly thereafter, some special education teachers commented in passing that I appeared to have some new responsibilities. I said "not that I know of," which only seemed to reinforce their suspicion that something, however subtle, had changed in the relationship between them and me.

Am I being supersensitive? I am not comfortable with the implication that I might become a "snoopervisor". I think my consultant work had been effective, and it has been rewarding to me, and I'm reluctant to see that lost. Any suggestions, before it all "hits the fan" with the teacher group?

INTER-OFFICE MEMORANDUM

TO: Lee Blank

DATE: Feb. 10

FROM: Margaret Russell

When Jimmy Mooney was placed in my class last October, we tried to make it understood that it was a trial placement. I am not sure how clearly Mr. & Mrs. Mooney perceive this however, as they were so wrapped up in finally getting Jimmy in some kind of school, that I think they were hearing only what they wanted to hear.

In any event, Jimmy is becoming more and more difficult and his extreme hyper-activity is disrupting the program for all the rest of the children to a degree that is really intolerable. In fairness to the other children, we just have to get him out of there. He has been here for three months now and if it was going to get any better we would have seen the results by this time.

I know that this is especially difficult what with Mr. Mooney being Chairman of the Citizen's Committee for Education and I realize that he is just as influential now as he was when he was serving as Mayor. What can we do?

M. Russell

DATE: February 11

TO: Lee Blank

FROM: Marvin Reed, Principal  
Harrison School

I have been working on my probationary teacher evaluations and it has occurred to me to ask just who is responsible for evaluating the Speech Therapist who works in my building. They never have been very clearly defined before but now that your position exists and as I understand it, they are under you, I would like to know my responsibility.

This has never been a concern before to me but since the new person has been assigned to my building this year, I have felt not entirely satisfied with the way she conducts her program. I don't claim to know anything about how speech therapy is supposed to work but Mrs. Matson seems grossly disorganized to me and her schedule seems to have both the teachers and students pretty mixed up.

In the case of psychologists who work in our building, I don't know who, if anybody evaluated their work. I know I never had a chance to express myself on it.

Also, we haven't had the threat of a Union grievance on this kind of thing till recently, and I don't want to misstep on that score. The contract doesn't speak to the issue, does it? should it?

DATE: February 14

TO: Lee Blank  
FROM: James Coleman, McClellan Junior High

I would like your advise on a situation developing between two of " our" specail class teachers. There seems to be a philosophical conflict, in that Mrs. Petre objects to the pressure being put on her by Don Smith to adopt some of his " contingency management " appraoches. Apparently, Don became a behavior modification devotee after spending last summer in Kansas and is really using it with his class. I was not wild about it when the floor was sticky with crushed M and M's all the time, but that has stopped now. I have hand it to Don, those kid's behave better than I ever expected to see in a specail class.

However, Lillian feels that the kids need more freedom and flexibility. She says all that counting and charting they do in Don's room is too mechanistic and the kids will become nothing but puppets. ( Some days we could use some puppets around here!) Since Lillian is new, she feels Don is using his seniority to force his ideas on her.

Should we have a position on this, referee a little, or just let them fight it out?

DATE: May 13

TO: Lee Blank

FROM: James Coleman, Principal  
McClellan Junior High

We seem to have something developed which is growing out of proportion regarding the kids in the lunchroom. As you probably know, all of the teachers in the building serve on some type of extra duty and certain ones through their own choice have been able to concentrate their duty assignments in one place. Mrs. Cameron, one of our English teachers has lunchroom duty every third week and every time so far, she has had considerable difficulty with the table from Miss Petre's class. After I had little luck in getting across to her what I felt would be better ways of handling the situation, I decided to turn to Miss Petre and ask her to talk with Mrs. Cameron about it. I guess this was the wrong thing to do because whatever Miss Petre said, Mrs. Cameron has become more and more anxious and outright angry. She seems to take it as an implication that she doesn't understand kids. As a result, Miss Petre and Mrs. Cameron are barely speaking and I think there might be dynamite when Mrs. Cameron draws lunchroom duty again next week. Can you suggest anything that might help?

TO: Lee Blank

DATE: May 14

FROM: Betty Bailey, Chief Nurse

I thought you should know of the conversation I had with Mr. Alfred Cleveland (a school committee member) at a meeting last night. Mr. Cleveland was inquiring as to our policy and practice regarding suggestions that might be made to parents whose children might be prescribed tranquilizers or other drugs as a means of controlling hyperactive behavior. Mr. Cleveland correctly assumed that we would be careful not to get into the area of prescribing medicines, but since he is an attorney, he was probably sensitive to the gray area into which we sometimes creep when nurses, or worse yet, classroom teachers, suggest to parents that they might consult with their physicians regarding the possibility of drug therapy.

I do not think that we have been guilty in this respect very often, but having the question raised by an attorney scared me a little. I would suppose that the teachers who are most vulnerable to getting into this kind of trouble would be your people in special education. Especially in the area of "educationally handicapped", where we are dealing with some children who in fact do have neurological handicaps, but a lot of others who may be emotionally disturbed (or perhaps just spoiled brats) the issue might get stickier.

Let me know if there is anything I can do to help with this matter, but I would appreciate knowing your thoughts regarding the role of teachers, nurses, your office and my own in this area. Just what is the price of malpractice insurance these days, anyway?